Breathe Me In (Exhale Slow)
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Breathe Me In (Exhale Slow)

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Summary

Gale's boot taps restlessly, knees bent to half–hunch over them, only his lower back leaning against the wall of the plane. He picks at the skin of baby–soft lips, staring out to the edge of the wing with glazed over eyes, and John's heart twists.

He can think of a hundred and one ways to distract him, but not a single word of reassurance. He's not good at that sort of thing; that's Gale's area of expertise. He feels useless.

"Here," he murmurs, holding out his cigarette.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

John leans back against the exterior of the plane as he watches Gale pace, hand visibly trembling in the dark when it runs through blond hair.

“Buck,” he exhales a cloud of smoke, cigarette dangling between two fingers. “You’re gonna drive yourself crazy thinkin’ about it.”

Gale scoffs, walking to the tip of the plane’s expansive wing. He has to raise his voice for it to carry across the distance in the muggy night air.

“Could’ve done something different,” he calls back. John shakes his head, even though Gale isn’t facing him to see.

“Can say that for anything,” he says calmly. “Stop tearing yourself up about it.”

Gale doesn’t move, pulling at a bandage on his finger, staring out over the field. John hates seeing him like this, hates that some missions cut him so deep.

It gets to him too, of course, but– alcohol aside– he has ways he’s learned to not internalize things so deeply. Losses still hurt, failed missions still beat him up inside, but there’s a time and a place. There has to be, or he’ll lose his mind.

Gale cares so deeply, and he tries to shoulder it all on his own and take on everyone else’s burdens, and it makes John want to shake him and yell at him for being selfless to the point of self–sabotage, but he knows it won’t make a difference; it’s just Gale’s nature, and in the end it’s something John deeply admires about his friend.

“Buck,” he tries again instead, letting one leg slide out to lay flat in front of him, his elbow leaning on the other where it’s crooked up.

Gale at least turns to look at him, worrying his thumb between his lips.

“C’mere,” John pats the spot next to him, the quiet *clank* of the metal sounding beneath his hand. He thinks maybe Gale is going to shake his head at him, but instead he sees his shoulders slump in defeat, and John smiles tiredly at him as he walks over, dropping down to sit next to him with a huff.

There’s something that soothes John as soon as Gale’s pressed boot to

thigh to arm at his side, washing over him like a cool wave. He wonders if Gale feels it too.

A quick glance throws that notion out the window. Gale's boot taps restlessly, knees bent to half–hunch over them, only his lower back leaning against the wall of the plane. He picks at the skin of baby–soft lips, staring out to the edge of the wing with glazed over eyes, and John's heart twists.

He can think of a hundred and one ways to distract him, but not a single word of reassurance. He's not good at that sort of thing; that's Gale's area of expertise. He feels useless.

"Here," he murmurs, holding out his cigarette. Gale turns his head and makes a face.

"No thanks."

John rolls his eyes.

"It'll help," he says, keeping his hand in place. "Gives your mind something to latch onto."

"Gives my throat something to burn from, too," Gale waves him off. "I'll pass."

John shrugs in indifference. He's not going to encourage an unhealthy habit; Gale's one of very few men on base who don't burn through a pack every other day.

But Gale goes right back to staring emptily over the acres of grass, picking at the edges of some gauze on his arm, not seeming to notice when it tugs at pink healing skin. John winces, bringing the cigarette back up to his lips, inhaling and wracking his brain.

When Gale hisses at the sting from a corner of the gauze peeling up, John's eyebrows furrow, and he makes a hasty decision.

"Hey," he breathes in. "Just– here."

He reaches his hand up to cup Gale's cheek in his palm, tilting his head to face him, taking in Gale's look of bewilderment before he leans in.

He slips his thumb over Gale's bottom lip as he does, pressing down on it to part his lips, opening his own just enough to exhale diluted

smoke into Gale's mouth.

Their lips don't touch– Gale's too skittish to risk that, and John's not sure he'd be able to keep himself together if he got a taste of what he's been aching for. But the noise of surprise Gale makes so close to his face sends him reeling, almost coughing on the smoke at the same moment Gale does.

John lets his hand fall from his face, leaning back, watching Gale cough a few times before he recovers, looking back at John with a slight pink flush creeping over his cheeks.

"Okay?" John asks, taking in Gale's deer–in–headlights expression, lips still parted as John had left them.

"Could've warned me," he gets out weakly, scratching his thigh thoughtlessly.

"You were miles away, Buck. Wouldn't have made a difference."

Gale looks a little lost now, like he's not quite sure what to do with himself, but not in that same pent–up, frustrated way. John weighs his options for a moment, letting his eyes roam over the tense angles of his friend's face.

He's notoriously hard to read, no matter how many years pass. But John is impulsive, and he has the weight of his flask burning a hole in his pocket to remind him that he has an excuse if what he wants to do backfires, and it wouldn't be the first time he's used it to write off things that have been a little too bold.

He sighs quietly, pushing himself away from the wall and onto his knees, shuffling around until he's sat in front of Gale. He leans his elbows on Gale's bent knees, watching the way blue eyes trail after every movement as he brings his cigarette back up to his mouth, taking another drag. He gives Gale ample time to shove him off, to tell him he's being an idiot, but he doesn't.

So he sits up again, bending over Gale's knees until they press against his lower ribs, tilting Gale's chin up with his free hand.

Gale wordlessly opens his mouth this time, expectant, and John's chest tightens as he leans in. His lips graze so lightly over Gale's, it can be considered a mistake, but the sensation hits John like someone's set off firecrackers in his veins as he blows the smoke between the two of them, feeling the way Gale shifts as he inhales.

His heart's pounding when he pulls back, waiting for Gale to come to his senses and call it a night, give him a gruff *'cool it'* like the other times John's let himself push a little too much, but the rejection never comes.

There's a tension in the air that John thinks both of them know will be broken by speaking, so he doesn't, pulling more nicotine into his lungs and leaning over Gale's legs again. The bruising pressure of his knees digging into his ribs helps dull the ache of his heart as he tries to commit to memory every drawn breath and scent and movement, because despite the part of him that foolishly hopes, he knows that come morning this might be something neither of them ever speak of again.

He hopes that Lucky Strikes will always remind him of this night, hopes it brings him back to it so vividly every time he lights one up that he has to switch brands or quit altogether.

He can't help but let his mouth drag against Gale's this time, placing his hand on the wall beside his head to steady himself, playing it off as being unbalanced from the awkward angle. Gale's eyes flutter closed, and John's stomach knots itself, taking in the vulnerable trust painting his face when he pulls away and stares.

Gale's shaky hands have steadied, and the pained look in his eyes has taken a backseat for a dazed one when he blinks them back open, silently questioning John's long pause.

John swallows hard, mouth dry, ignoring the way heat is creeping towards his fingers as embers eat away at his cigarette. His rationality and self control slip away as fast as the falling ash is carried off by the warm summer breeze, all too aware of how close he is to crossing an invisible line, a point of no return.

He decides that the little time they have is too precious to spend it wondering what could have been.

He carefully nudges at Gale's knees, a wordless urge to part them, and Gale does, a beautiful flush dancing over the bridge of his nose. John's heart surges with adoration, pulling one last inhale from his cigarette to save face, his sides burning red–hot where Gale's knees bracket him in as he presses his lips against his.

John doesn't exhale this time, letting the smoke flow between them on its own as he kisses Gale softer than he knew he was capable. He drops the butt of his cigarette so he can take Gale's face in both of his

hands, holding him like he's made of glass, like they both are, like they're as fragile as this moment in time.

It's like a flare gun to the skull when he feels Gale press back into the kiss, one hand settling in the back of his hair, the other finding his hip. He's certain he must be the one shaking now, so scared that if he pulls away, Gale will come to his senses and remember how perilous this is.

But when his ears start ringing and he finally has to break away for air, Gale's the one to pull him back down, squeezing his hip like he's afraid *John* will be the one to walk away from this, an idea that's almost laughable to John because he's pretty sure that a bomb going off wouldn't even be enough to drag him away right now.

He tries to communicate as much, placing his palms on Gale's knees to push them down flat so he can crawl closer without breaking their kiss, settling his own knees on either side of Gale's hips and sinking down into his lap.

He has to crane his neck more at this angle, but it's worth it for the way Gale melts under his warmth, the hand on his hip moving up to rest on the small of his back, heat seeping through his shirt. He tugs at Gale's bottom lip with his teeth, gentle in his efforts to consume him whole.

Gale makes a breathy little noise and John rumbles low in his throat, running his tongue over the place his teeth had been before slipping it between Gale's lips, kissing him with the desperation of a man who's been waiting his whole life. He feels it deep in his chest, blooming tendrils rooting themselves between his ribs, and he thinks Gale feels it too with the way he kisses back, every movement a silent reassurance.

Same. Me too. I know. I've been waiting, too.

The earthy, burnt taste of cigarette mixes with the mint of the gum Gale always keeps tucked between his teeth and cheek, and it's the sweetest thing John's tasted. It seeps into his skin, warms him from head to toe, ash and peppermint and tobacco filling his head with cotton the same way baby blues and drawled words do.

He pulls away from the kiss to dip his head lower, pressing his lips to the crook of Gale's neck, grazing his teeth over his pulse.

"John," Gale breathes out, cautionary, a reminder of their

circumstances. John nods, leaving an apologetic kiss on warm skin, nuzzling his face against his neck.

“I know,” his voice comes out raspier than he expects, thick with emotion. Gale runs his fingers through his hair, cradling the back of his head, holding him close.

“We’ve got time,” Gale murmurs, and John can hear all the different ways he means it, lets it sink into his bones. He hesitates before he speaks, still afraid to shatter the bubble around them.

“Don’t change your mind in the morning,” he whispers. “Please.”

Gale stills beneath him, and then lips press to his temple, and John feels well and truly unraveled.

“I couldn’t even if I tried, John.”

And that’s more than enough.

End Notes

Hi sweet humans!! Something small and soft to start the week off, hope you enjoy. ♡ Title yoinked from Troye Sivan's song 'Lucky Strike' because how could I not?

EDIT: SOMEONE MADE ART!! FOR THIS FIC!! HELLO!!! PLEASE GO LOOK!!! TUMBLR LINK

I have literally a dozen WIPs in my docs right now, but this post of mine has been floating around in my head for a bit, and then immediately upon waking up today an idea was born from it and I had to sit down and get this out in one go lol.

I definitely still wanna do a weed shotgunning fic (likely nsfw lbr lmao) but I have a multi–part idea I'm reallyyyy keen to keep working on at the moment, so maybe in the future!

Also, I literally wept reading the comments on my last fic, everyone is SO SO KIND and I want to print the comments out and paste them to my wall wahhh. So sweet and SO so motivating to keep plucking away at my WIPs, thank you so much. ♡

I've been answering TONS of brainrot/drabble asks on my tumblr if you wanna come yap with me or follow progress on my WIPs or just cry about MOTA lol, and I've been posting some BuckBucky art there as well!

Thank you againnn for the love, I can't wait to keep writing for this show. This fandom is so rad. :^)

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!